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THE WAR CLOUD.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

WEST CHURCH, BOSTON,

SUNDAY, NOV. 24, 1873.

BY C. A. BARTOL

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A SERMON.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation." — PROVERBS xiv. 34.

So Hebrew wisdom conceived of a nation or people, not as separate individuals, but one social and political person, as a compound battery is one by communication of the galvanic fluid through many distinct jars.

How truly every nation that has a name on the globe is such a definite, living, self-conscious body, — England feeling a stain on her honor as a wound, as a man would; Germany gathering her clans, long-scattered members, proudly under rule of one heart and brain; France paying her indemnity and nursing her revenge; Russia and Austria, like the eagle and bear in their emblems, jealously claiming whatever in any old title is put down; America fusing into unity the disunited States. We remember the miraculous swiftness for intelligence of events, without newspaper or telegraph or railway, among the black race during the rebel war. It was because the black race, on the question of freedom and their civil rights, were from the Potomac to the Red River as one man.

So a country, our country like any other, may be virtuous or wicked, right or wrong; and patriotism may be a grace, or also a vice if we encourage or abet the wrong, it being part

of self-examination and taking spiritual stock to find out our share in the common temper and aim. Just now there is a popular stir felt by us all, as boats feel a swell of the sea, towards Cuba,—an island still held by Spain,—in consequence of the capture and massacre of a crew sailing under the American flag; and what notice to take of the atrocity is the point to which the deliberations of the government and the passions of the land, blowing like the late hurricane, converge.

Can the affair be settled and the agitation composed by peaceful debate? or shall we be driven to the last resort of ambitious kings and aggrieved tribes?

I propose some reasons against the arbitrament of the sword, the dread conclusion that ends no matter of moral argument,—the at best rough and ragged justice of war.

First, that it is a *brutal* and *barbarous* court of decision none can deny. Our organic combativeness, serve whatever useful and necessary purpose it may, is the remnant of the *beast* in us, while we have got rid of his actual claws and horns and shaggy hide; and it would seem our animal descent has a proof, independent of the naturalist's research, in the same dispositions which we indulge. The bestial propensities are no fossils.

We do not have to hunt them up in caves of the earth! They are not *missing links* in that imperfect record of the lower creatures mounting to mankind. They are alive, ever ready to spring at the base of our brain.

They plant their battery inside the human skull; and all the blazing ordnance in the field of battle borrows their fire.

The cannon is our claw ; a gun is our horn ; a pack of artillery our yell and howl ; levelled muskets, pointed bayonets, drawn sabres, the teeth we show and bite with. What denizen of desert or jungle can push so fierce, tear so deep, gore so sharp, clench so hard ? Our nails are worse to rend and poison than any old bony excrescences from which they come. In fight we rise not to the angel ; we revert to the brute. As essences and extracts are made of vegetable substances, all the wild inhabitants, our ancestors, seem packed away, to come forth on occasion, in our constitution. They are not confined yonder, in bars and wires ; we are their living cage !

But this combustible deposit from Saurian monsters in the human head is no essential evil. It has a wise design and just occasion to break forth ; only be conscience and reason in command ! A shrewd old Boston lawyer told a young enthusiast for peace, he might as well undertake to put down thunder and lightning as *war* ; and now, thirty years after, the great German free-thinker, Dr. Strauss, uses the same figure. My friend, in the same view, seeing that the women were summoned to a world's convention to make peace, wondered how much they would make. Yet let me say the frequency and violence of thunder and lightning depend on the climate, the amount of corruption in the air, generated by tropic heats more than temperate zones ; and protestation against causeless and unjustifiable wars of aggression, conquest, and wanton rebellion, are among the means by which the moral and political foulness may be reduced without the dreadful flashes and destroying bolts. When, a century ago,

British oppression and taxation without representation could no longer be borne, there was providential ground for war. In time of nullification and secession in our own day, when the slaveholders' guns were turned against our own forts, war became necessary to national existence, and what is *necessary* is divine.

But what occasion of war have we now? None that will stand the test of righteous judgment or religious truth.

By the *voluntarios* in Cuba, the bloody janizaries that assume in the premises without proper authority to act for Spain, an inhuman massacre has been perpetrated, and deserves to be rebuked by all the humanity, organized or private, in the world; but for two nations to continue and institute massacre on the great scale of battle, and dye the sea and stain the land with gore, were a sorry cure.

But our FLAG, — has not that been insulted in the capture of the "Virginus" sailing under it with American papers in due form, and execution at the drum-head of her crew? Shall we not avenge the affront, as the shrieks in the New York meeting, the screams of *war*, WAR, demand! Certainly not, till we know more clearly what title that vessel had to our flag. "Shoot the man," well said General Dix, in our great insurrection, "who hauls it down."

But the man that drags it through the dirt, after any vile errand, into any illicit enterprise, equally deserves to be shot.

We must understand what our flag is made to cover before we are so eager to punish its subjection to formal disrespect. What is the flag? A piece of cloth? Bunting is cheap!

You can buy white and red colors easy! Are the Stars and Stripes so much woven wool and dye-stuff?

The hoisting of a banner at mast-head, as all naval history shows, no more surely signifies a lawful purpose or patriotic intent than wrapping it round a coffin is a certificate of honor without spot for the soldier that lies within. He may have been an unblemished sacrifice, or a secret traitor or mercenary tool. A flag may be a forgery, as you know the signet of a king has not seldom been stolen for a false seal.

The ship, flying our flag in the breeze, is part of our soil, we say, sacred from molestation by any foreign hand. But soiling our flag can sanctify iniquity neither on firm ground nor tossing deck. If our flag covers that, so much the worse for the flag! If, where the flag goes, the nation goes, the nation may be led anywhere by the nose.

Now no one pretends that the flag in this case was raised over any undertaking authorized by the government of the United States, or in the ordinary transactions of trade, or amenably to the statutes of the land; but for the shield of a filibustering expedition, to lend a hand to the Cuban insurgents against the Spanish rule.

Their rising in that beautiful island, queen of the Antilles, one of a flock that beat for admission at our windows like frightened doves, may be a noble act, and command our sympathy and whatever material aid *any one* can fitly render.

But the men that launch forth to take part in it, with their arms and ammunition, go at their peril, run their risk, take their lives in their hand, and leave their citizenship behind!

They are not our accredited representatives, or agents, we are under any political or international obligation to protect. We may admire their spirit, honor their errand, imitate if we will their example, cry out before high heaven when they become victims of a ferocity beyond our reach, and stir up at home or abroad a feeling of indignation against their murderous taking-off; but, nevertheless, they laid aside their passport, and forfeited its guard in their deed, which their executioners call piracy, and we must confess is privateering, though for an object that makes them martyrs of freedom; and I, for one, thank the great Massachusetts Senator for the letter, in the hot assembly, furnishing no fuel for its flame; although we cannot quite parallel the "Virginus" with the "Alabama" sent out in aid of slavery and of the acknowledged belligerent right of a slave power; and the technical case is with us for the former vessel, taken on the high seas, having committed no hostile act, but with intent to aid a chronic insurrection in favor of liberty. Yet, with a Christian nation, no technicality can be a ground for war, whatever reason for atonement and reparation. Besides, how we differ, and our prints and publicists dispute whether the "Virginus" were properly registered with authentic papers, as a national merchantman; and none pretend she was authorized as a privateer! Shall we go to war against the Spanish construction on a difference of opinion among ourselves? When the scale hung even between the North and the South, should we have suffered a Spanish cruiser to land recruits for the enemy? I think there would have been a "Tornado" after her very quick!

How slowly we yielded our title to the capture of Mason and Slidell, the confederate emissaries, who were going away! The crew of the "Virginius" danced and sang on board, at Kingston in Jamaica, before sailing for Cuba, and did not think the play would become a tragedy, as Byron writes how the roar of the cannon broke in on the ball at "Belgium's capital" before the battle of Waterloo.

But shall not that butchery by the Spanish volunteers be avenged? How avenged? With war? Will you bring a pail of blood to wash out a spot on the floor? Will a hundred thousand unoffending lives be a meet sacrifice to vindicate and redeem a hundred? Would the end be achieved, when our armed intervention were so likely to unseat the noble President Castelar, and restore despotism, that the violence of the Cuban volunteers is suspected of being a trick with that design?

Moreover, if a nation or people have an individual or personal character, as, under the name of Israel, the Jews had with the Lord in the Old Testament, then it is bound to some virtue and honor in its conduct; and is vengeance the virtue whose blazon its escutcheon is to bear? Rufus Choate said, for a nation, prudence is the prince of the virtues. May we not add *patience*, in making out the list? Is a great country to be excused more than a great man from forbearance and long suffering as a becoming quality? I suppose we should be most ashamed at any taunt of lacking courage; proudest of being high-spirited and quick to resent an insult. I am afraid we are not apt to be mortified or peni-

tent for that sin of covetousness so emphatically, in every enumerated or possible manifestation, forbidden in the decalogue; for do we not covet our neighbor's goods in that chief island of the West India group, whose beauty ages of tyranny have not stained, whose fertility the destitution of inveterate slavery has not been able to destroy? We want to pull and pluck from the tree what will at length fall like a ripe pear into our hand; and this motive of territorial acquisition, which actuated the South, wishing to maintain her system of bondage, stirs under all our profession, however genuine, of sympathy with the Cuban patriots in the struggle for freedom, which we pray God to bless. But do we not owe some sympathy to Spain, their mother-land, striving to be a republic, lifting her head out of the pit into which by old avarice and selfish aggrandizement she has been plunged? Might not American generosity to an infantile, yet hopeful effort after institutions like our own be, and by the world be accepted, for no sacrifice of real dignity, touched though it is by injury no ability apparently exists immediately to repair? Magnanimity is graceful and sublime as a private trait. Is it conspicuously displayed by a nation hastily seizing an opportunity for combat with a weaker sister, because our generals, congressional orators, and commander-in-chief are reported to affirm we are in a condition successfully to cope with and inevitably at last subdue her, annexing the colony at leisure, like a thief in a jeweler's shop, putting the Caribbean gem in our pocket, and fattening our exchequer with the immense profits of all the sugar and tobacco her plantations *can produce*?

Righteousness exalteth a nation,—any body of men. I have noticed that railways, cities, towns, churches, can, without compunction, in pride of accumulated strength, can act more meanly than private persons! I suppose it is because "corporations have no soul"; or their dealings have given rise to the proverb that they have none; or their affairs, about which questions arise, fall into the hands of small-minded and jealous representatives, who only voice the insolence and envy of those for whom they speak. So an alderman can insult a common citizen with impunity; and there shall be no redress, because the alderman stands for the metropolis, and the citizen only for his own property or house! Thus it is that mighty nations, England with Denmark, Austria with Hungary, Russia with Poland, let us not have to add, America with Spain, play on occasion such contemptible parts; they think themselves, so high and mighty, exonerated from the laws of truth and equity binding on single men. But God will not exonerate them; history will not exonerate; and Spain, in her long degradation, has herself suffered the retribution, from which no wrong-doing, on a scale however large, is excused. Let us honor the Cuban rebels! They circulate our spiritual blood. They are our and our father's kith and kin,—no such rebels as slavery breeds. Their aim, their endurance, their rising to renewed effort out of a thousand martyrdoms, their retreat to their mountain fortresses to sally forth untired, kindling what the despots seek to quench with their blood, is an omen of triumphant attainment, which Heaven grant, however long delayed! Let us help them

with our fellowship in the spirit, our aspirations and prayers ; and, if that be hailed with sarcasm as an impotent word, with whatever substantial tokens we justly may ; but not with greed or falsehood or violations of international law. If we want to fight with Spain when she is weak, and, on infinitely more grievous occasion, not with England because she was strong, it shows we are a bully folk, and not a brave one.

It is a reason against war, that it rouses the murderous appetite we want to keep as much possible asleep in its den and lair at the bottom of the human head. Woe to him that stirs it from its couch ! It is an impression among the common people, who are wiser than the scholars, that even from our last war, with all its noble incentives and inevitable career, has sprung in part the tendency — a long fiery comet, tail and train — to violence which disgraces the land, engages the criminal courts, and, exciting a thirst for war, wakens the fierce inclination into greater activity. It is sowing dragon's teeth, for a crop by and by.

Once more : if encouraging contention is against character, it is also poor economy. Certain kinds of industry it promotes ; but not the wealth-producing sort. Some people got rich out of our other quarrel, at the cost of general poverty and unpaid debt, a suspension of specie payment, a ruinous expansion of credit, a launching into unremunerative enterprise, a chronic insolvency ; a sound basis of business yet to be postponed how long ! Shall we dilute our money and involve our finances still further ? Already our preparations have drawn us into ten or twelve millions of expense. Should

the trouble go on, how the hammers will be heard in the navy-yards, the spindles buzz in the mills, the grain from the West pour into and out of the elevators, to meet the contingencies of strife! So money will seem to be plenty, because a great deal will have to be disbursed, changing hands; but all will be for consumption, and not creation of value. Spoiled children of Providence, what cause have we to complain of distress and stinted fortunes, when we are so lavish in luxury and show? We will not bear any ridicule of the narcotics that so terribly bleed our purse, or any prohibition of the rum that burns up our frame; and half of us seem ready for that intoxicant of battle which wastes the social organism, and that narcotic of shot-wounds and sword-cuts that would lay thousands of our sons, as some that listen to me know how well, to rest indeed, as a soporific for the last sleep!

Yet we complain to the Lord of our scant means, and wonder how through the cold season it will be with the poor.

Well, with *winter* and *war*, how *will* it be? Who is really interested to maintain, but the military contractors and officers who have a taste for, the fray? In the play of "Measure for Measure," Shakespeare makes one of his gentlemen say, "There's not a soldier of us all, that, in the thanksgiving before meat, doth relish the petition well that prays for peace." But I relish it well, and conjure you with me most fervently to put it up!

But it is our *manifest* destiny to absorb Cuba and St. Domingo, and the whole brood of islands at the mouth of the Gulf, that have lighted like wild ducks in the water, or have

anchored like a fugitive flotilla at our side? If it is destiny, we need not help it with our will, or thrust our untimely finger in. Destiny will take care of itself. The ark of the Lord, in its progress, needs no steadying at any Uzziah's hands.

So far as we can fairly extend through the world our work of liberation from bonds of slavery, we shall have his blessing, of honor greater than if Canada and Cuba, in addition to Louisiana, Texas, and California, were joined to our domain. If the Monroe doctrine can be applied to forbid the perpetuation of bondage in the western hemisphere, Heaven will smile.

Meantime, let events ripen other communities for association with us, while we forbear hankering after any Naboth's vineyard. A griping digestion will come from grasping, like big boys that rob the orchard, green apples to devour; and Cuba is a green apple yet! "I am for peace." As David said, "Blessed are the peace-makers"; that benediction of the Master, were we not false disciples to miss?

We keep explosives in a safe place. Let us hold stricter watch over this more dangerous ammunition in the brain, nor trust our combustibles in rash or reckless hands. The license over the door to sell gunpowder, we should withdraw from any imprudent or treacherous charge. Let us not confide in the demagogues who stir up strife, such as some whom I could name!

If it be said that, on the principle of personal character in a people, one community should love another, and a nation

like ours is bound to act in behalf of whoever is struggling for freedom, the answer is, When the nation, as such, through its constituted authority so proceeds, its protection may be expected by the agents it employs! But any individuals assuming to be agents, on their own motion, must be understood as manifesting their particular affection, and not the organic regard of the whole. In such advances lie the grandeurs of heroism; and they who make them, if in no quixotic or fruitless enterprises, may win crowns of martyrs, and wear palms of the saints. They transcend the guidance of statutes, which but reflect a borrowed light, to walk amid the splendors of the higher law. No nation or institution can keep up with them, but only at long intervals follow after their strides. They appeal to no code; they invoke no human defence; they look up to no earthly banner. God is their shield! They refer themselves to his bar. The justification they may get in no lower court, they receive in his present witness and final award. By that verdict, of which no mortal government can be minister or sentinel, men and nations in time or eternity must abide.



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